
Task Organize Light AT Company For Light Cavalry Missions

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Several years ago, while serving as an antitank (AT) platoon leader in an airborne battalion, I realized the effectiveness of a scouting element, preferably mobile, with an attached AT element. Although light battalion scouts can effectively carry out security operations in heavily forested terrain, their lack of high mobility against armor cannot be compared with the effectiveness of an AT company that is task organized as a light cavalry troop.

Antitank companies are ideally suited for cavalry troop missions—*conduct reconnaissance and security (R&S), execute an attack, defend, and delay*—as part of the battalion (squadron) or brigade (regiment). But this would require a temporary reorganization of the company to conduct security operations.

Typically, light cavalry troops are organized with two platoons of ten M1025 or 1026 HMMWVs (high-mobility multipurpose wheeled vehicles) armed with five .50 caliber heavy machineguns and five Mk 19 automatic grenade launchers. Each of the scout platoons has a habitual relationship with an AT platoon consisting of four M996 HMMWVs armed with four TOW systems. The scout platoon deploys a screen line and conducts reconnaissance and security operations to locate the enemy and ascertain his strength and

direction of march, while simultaneously vectoring the AT platoon toward a preplanned attack-by-fire (ABF) position to destroy the enemy.

Although this cavalry troop task organization may not be feasible for the antitank company, a variant of this configuration—two six-vehicle scout platoons and two four-vehicle antitank platoons—could achieve similar results. Some antitank companies still have their platoon leaders mounted in M996 hardshells, as opposed to M998 cargo HMMWVs. This gives a platoon leader a greater level of protection and allows him to mount a weapon system. Twenty to twenty-five weapons platoons enable commanders to achieve great flexibility in the employment of their platoons.

Each scout platoon would consist of three 2-vehicle sections or two 3-vehicle sections plus a platoon leader and platoon sergeant, each in an M998, or an M998 and an M996. Each section would be under a staff sergeant section leader. The platoon leader would command one section and the platoon sergeant would command the other. In a cavalry troop, senior platoon leaders operate as scout platoon leaders because their operations are more decentralized than those of an AT platoon. The scout platoon leader would serve first as an

antitank platoon leader but move up to a scout platoon as he gained experience. This would give platoon leaders in AT companies a wide range of experience and leadership. Antitank platoons would task organize in accordance with their normal modified tables of organization and equipment (MTOE).

The light division ground troop task organization gives AT company commanders more flexibility in task organizing their platoons. A scout AT team, known as a SCAT, places four M1025/1026 HMMWV-mounted scout squads and a section of M996 TOW-mounted HMMWVs in each platoon. Antitank companies can achieve this same task organization, as the situation dictates, and still have a company reserve of section strength. The tactical employment of these platoons is the same as separate scout and AT platoons. The four scout vehicles locate and report, while the AT section moves to an ABF position to destroy the enemy.

Dismounted operations for the cavalry troop consist of hasty dismounting, local security, observation posts (OPs), and patrolling. Dismount drills are a standing operating procedure used frequently and in several situations, including establishing local security or a hasty OP, conducting a hasty reconnaissance, and clearing a danger area. Pla-

toons can determine which of these hasty dismount tasks they most frequently accomplish and develop a chart that standardizes hasty dismount loads (personal equipment, weapons, and dismounted radio). Leadership for the dismounted element operating as a section or platoon would be provided by the platoon leader or a designated section leader. The platoon leader's wing man should be the dismount team leader for the section, if the platoon is operating in two 3-vehicle sections. The platoon leader would become the gunner for his vehicle (if he is mounted in an M966) and send his gunner to become the vehicle commander for the absent section leader. The three-man crew of a M996 HMMWV would provide one dismount per vehicle and either two or three per section. According to AT platoon tactics, the driver is supposed to dismount to provide local security while the vehicle is stationary. Therefore, during R&S operations the driver would remain with the vehicle while the gunner would dismount and the vehicle commander would move to the weapon system. Subsequently, with screening operations, a section can dismount two or three of its crew members to act as a dismounted observation post. When personnel shortages are a problem, the AT company can still fulfill the role of cavalry, if only in a mounted role. Field Manual 17-98, *Scout Platoon*, provides further information on dismounted operations.

An AT company configured as a cavalry troop can operate effectively in a high-, middle-, or low-intensity conflict. In a high-intensity operation, AT platoons are best suited for covering force area (CFA) operations. Once they collapse the CFA, they withdraw to their battle positions along pre-planned routes. The AT company or part of it can participate in stay-behind operations to provide the task force commander with real-time intelligence on the approaching enemy forces.

Typically, a ground troop commander has a habitual relationship with an air troop in the divisional cavalry squadron or armored cavalry regiment. Although the commanders own their individual battle space, the air troop commander is

responsible for coordinating his efforts with those of the ground troop commander. Air and ground units work together to make an effective team in conducting cavalry operations. Air troops can conduct area reconnaissance while the ground troop conducts a detailed route, area, or zone reconnaissance. The air scouts can provide flank security, and when the ground troop disengages from their screen line, the air troop can maintain contact with the enemy. Therefore, AT company commanders should become experts in operating with air scout platoons from the light cavalry squadron. Handing over the air battle to ground forces is a delicate operation that requires cooperation, habitual relationships, and detailed rehearsals. Antitank company external evaluations should include a covering force operation. Battalion aviation liaisons should evaluate the air/ground coordination between the AT company

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commander and the air scout platoon leader or troop commander. Some might argue that this is the mission of the division cavalry ground troop, but the division battle space is significantly larger than the troop's available assets can effectively cover. When participating as part of a brigade, one or more AT companies can be detailed to augment the cavalry platoon in the CFA under the division cavalry squadron commander. This is where the AT platoon can expand its operations and provide more flexibility for the battalion and brigade commanders.

A low intensity or stability and support environment does not preclude the use of the AT company in its role as a cavalry troop. Antitank companies can conduct route reconnaissance, perform area or zone reconnaissance and checkpoint operations, establish a buffer zone between belligerents, conduct patrols to maintain law and order, escort nongovernmental organization personnel, and

provide convoy security and border surveillance and security. The light infantry division combat training center rotations emphasize forced entry into a regional conflict. Antitank companies organized as cavalry troops and augmented by air scouts could aid commanders in entering the combat zone by saturating the area with air and mounted reconnaissance elements in advance of the main body. As they infiltrate the combat zone they can dismount the battalion scouts.

During the search and attack phase of a movement to contact, AT companies task organized as cavalry troops can be augmented with dismounted rifle squads. The mission of the AT platoons would be to operate as a ready reaction force once the motorized scout platoons locate the enemy. Scout platoons would saturate the most active area of operations with surveillance assets, while their habitual AT platoons would remain in covered and concealed positions within easy response distance.

The cargo HMMWVs from the scout platoon and AT platoon could be consolidated to carry a rifle platoon. The mounted scout platoon would then vector the AT platoon with the rifle squads or platoon to ambush enemy infiltrators. The antitank company's thermal sight could be used in a handheld mode without the rest of the TOW system. This would help the company make the most of its surveillance assets. An ideal set-up is the current configuration used by mechanized scouts, in which the thermal sight is mounted on a bracket next to the .50 caliber machinegun on the stacking swivel. This mount would be a welcome addition to the MTOE of AT companies. It would give them the same capability with the TOW night sight mounted or the M2 heavy machinegun or mounted Mk 19 automatic grenade launcher.

During noncombatant evacuation operations (NEOs), the AT company could provide commanders with economy of force by placing the company in a screen line around the extraction site to provide early warning or clearing. This would free at least a rifle company on perimeter security. An air landed AT company offers high mobility, fire-

power, and surveillance capabilities. Subsequently, the AT company could clear the route to the NEO location and transport dismounts, or provide transport to the extraction site. Antitank companies would also be ideally suited for border interdiction missions. They would need no transportation assets to move to their OPs, and their thermal sights, which can be mounted on the traversing units without mounting the weapon systems, would provide stable platforms for conducting long-term observation. In addition, the vehicles could operate for at least three days before requiring Class I and III resupply.

Training

Antitank companies do not have their own field manual prescribing their employment as cavalry scouts, but Field Manual (FM) 17-97, *The Cavalry Troop*, could provide commanders with tactics, techniques, and procedures. The skills required of soldiers in the 19D and 11B military occupational specialties (MOSSs) would also be required of those in 11H, but these skills are familiar to many AT platoon personnel.

FM 17-98-1, *Scout Leaders Handbook*, outlines the skills 19D scout leaders must know to shoot, move, and communicate: Command and control of a scout platoon or section; intelligence preparation of the battlefield; combat vehicle identification; call for and adjust

indirect fire; conduct air/ground coordination, implement scouting techniques (recon, security, dismounted operations, battle drills); utilize demolitions and classify obstacles; and survive in a hostile environment (escape and evasion).

The AT company leaders could be sent to the Scout Platoon Leaders Course at Fort Knox. This three-week course focuses on intelligence preparation of the battlefield, the orders process, combat vehicle identification, scouting tactics, techniques, and procedures, zone and area reconnaissance, and security operations. Subsequently, a TOE change should be submitted to reflect the diverse missions and the new skills required of AT company personnel. For junior enlisted personnel the battalion scouts can provide a modified train-up in scouting techniques.

In the absence of an AT company gunnery manual for their heavy weapons, commanders could use FM 17-12-8, *Light Cavalry Gunnery*, published by the Armor Center, which focuses on scout section gunnery. AT company commanders need to become familiar with formations: troop column, troop line, troop vee, and troop split-vee, all of which are explained in detail in FM 17-97. ARTEP 17-487-30-MTP, *Mission Training Plan for the Regimental Armored Cavalry Troop*, will give commanders a descriptive, performance-oriented training guide for evaluating their units.

In an AT company organized as a cavalry troop, the commander also becomes the battalion's reconnaissance commander. He coordinates the efforts of the dismounted and mounted scouts, as well as those of air cavalry assets operating in his battle space. The executive officer can help the commander by passing information to higher headquarters, tracking the battle from the company tactical operations center, and monitoring and coordinating the efforts of the air troop. Each AT company has the unique ability to operate multiple long range communications, which makes it ideal for this role. Redundancy is achieved because each platoon leader has a radio in his vehicle for long range communications.

Operating as a cavalry troop, the AT company gives a battalion commander a flexible asset to augment forces executing his reconnaissance and security operations in any battlefield environment. It can also provide the commander protection in the defense and the elements of speed and surprise in the attack.

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